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Fishermen: It's time for reel change

- Call for free, one-time fishing license registration
- Schumer, others say current system problematic

BY BILL BLEYER
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The state should replace its new annual saltwater fishing license with a free, one-time registration system, Sen. Charles Schumer and local fishing and boating groups said yesterday.

The New York Democrat called on federal officials and the state Department of Environmental Conservation to make the change because "the new system is riddled with problems. It is too complex and the cost is unfair" when so many are struggling financially.

He said fishermen found it difficult to obtain the license, though the state says it has sold 32,000 licenses through its Web site, a dedicated phone line and 1,450 licensing agents at bait shops and other locations.

It was especially unfair to have begun the program Oct. 1, then require fishermen to buy another license three months later, said Schumer, who cited Delaware as a state that collects federally required statistics from fishermen with a free registry system. Delaware, however, requires fishermen to register annually and also requires most of them to purchase an annual \$8.50 license, said Craig Shirey, fisheries administrator for the Delaware Division of Fish & Wildlife.

DEC spokeswoman Lori Severino declined to comment on Schumer's proposal. But she said "any changes would have to go through the State Legislature," which approved the license bill drafted with DEC.

The law requires annual licenses that cost \$10 for individuals. Fishing boat owners can buy a license for \$400 that covers all of their customers.

Federal law requires states to implement licensing or registration systems by 2010 or go with a federal system that charges higher fees and directs the money to the U.S. Treasury. The fees collected by the DEC cover license processing costs with leftover funds going to fish management programs, Severino said.

Schumer said the processing costs could be covered by other taxes. But neither Schumer nor the DEC could detail those costs.

The federal law is aimed at helping the government better determine how many people are fishing and for which species so it more effectively sets catch limits.

Schumer pointed out that the federal law does not require states to collect a fee or maintain an annual license system. While he said no state has one-time registration, he maintained that would still allow federal officials to contact fishermen to obtain necessary information. He added that the state is already offering a lifetime license for \$150 so an annual program is unnecessary.

Teri Frady, spokeswoman for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said "the law doesn't require a fee but allows for it. The law doesn't require that it be annual." But she added that NOAA wants annual licensing because it uses the registrations to survey fishermen and a one-time sign up would not provide current information.

Schumer was joined in Point Lookout by representatives of the United Boatmen of New York, the New York Sportfishing Federation and other groups that argued eliminating the license fee would boost fishing and generate local spending and tax revenue that would offset the loss of license fees.

- Read the article.
- Answer the following questions on looseleaf paper.

- 1) What is the main problem addressed in the article?
- 2) List 3 arguments made by NY Senator Charles Schumer.
- 3) According to the article, the federal government has passed a law that requires all states to implement a licensing or registration system (or follow the federal system) by 2010. What is the purpose of this federal law?
- 4) How does the purpose of the law relate to the concept of the tragedy of the commons?
- 5) List the different government and other interest groups mentioned in the article.

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